United Airlines Companion Fare: Strategy and In-Depth Usage Guide

The annual companion fare benefit available through Chase United MileagePlus credit cards provides one of the most consistently valuable travel card benefits for regular United flyers — but its value depends entirely on understanding the companion fare model, selecting the right routes, and using the benefit at the optimal time of year. Call +1(855)235-0484 for companion fare booking. This guide examines in depth the economic structure of United's companion fare, the strategic framework for route selection, multi-year value optimization, and how United's companion fare compares to other airline companion programs across the industry.

United Companion Fare — 2026 Reference

- Structure: discounted set companion fare — not taxes-only
- Value = regular economy fare minus companion fare amount
- Annual benefit earned at Chase United card anniversary renewal
- Card tier hierarchy: Club Infinite > Club Business > Quest > Explorer
- Premium cards offer largest companion fare discounts and broadest route eligibility
- Basic Economy typically excluded; standard economy or higher for primary traveler
- Same-flight requirement on all segments — companion on identical United itinerary
- Cannot be booked online self-service; requires phone application
- One use per anniversary year — expires if not used
- MileagePlus earning: both travelers earn based on respective fares paid
- Premier benefits: cardholder's status applies; companion uses their own status
- Optimal routes: Newark, O'Hare, Houston to West Coast or Hawaii during peak periods
- Booking: purchase primary ticket first, then call +1(855)235-0484

THE ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF UNITED'S COMPANION FARE: A DETAILED ANALYSIS

To understand the full value picture of United's companion fare benefit, it helps to model the economics explicitly across different route and timing scenarios. This analysis reveals when the companion fare provides maximum value and when it may be less

optimal compared to simply purchasing two regular economy tickets.

Scenario 1 — High-value: A peak-summer Newark-to-Honolulu round trip where economy fares are $650. The companion fare is a set amount well below the regular fare. Companion savings: substantial — the companion pays far less than the regular fare. Annual benefit value: high. This is the target scenario for maximizing the companion fare benefit each year.

Scenario 2 — Moderate value: A spring Newark-to-Chicago O'Hare round trip where economy fares are $250. The companion savings are the gap between $250 and the companion fare amount. This is a moderate-value use of the benefit — better than forfeiting the benefit, but lower than a peak-period transcon or Hawaii booking.

Scenario 3 — Low value: A mid-week off-peak Chicago-to-Cleveland round trip where economy fares are $120. If the companion fare is close to this level, the savings are minimal. This is the worst-case companion fare use scenario — the companion is paying nearly as much as the regular fare, and the benefit value is nearly zero. Strategic planning avoids this scenario entirely by reserving the companion benefit for higher-fare qualifying trips.

Companion fare value framework: model the regular fare vs. companion fare gap before using the benefit on any route. High-value scenarios (large gap) are worth targeting proactively; low-value scenarios (small gap) should be avoided if higher-value alternatives exist.

UNITED'S HUB NETWORK ADVANTAGE FOR COMPANION FARE OPTIMIZATION

United's hub structure creates specific opportunities for companion fare value maximization. Understanding which United hubs produce the longest domestic routes helps identify the best annual companion fare opportunities.

Newark Liberty International Airport — United's largest trans-Atlantic hub and primary East Coast domestic hub — is the departure point for some of the longest domestic routes in the U.S. system. Newark to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, and Honolulu are all long-haul domestic routes where economy fares regularly reach $400–$800 during peak periods. For Chase United cardholders based in or near the New York metropolitan area, these Newark routes are the primary companion fare value opportunity.

Chicago O'Hare — United's largest hub by departures — offers similar long-haul domestic opportunity. O'Hare to Honolulu, Los Angeles, or San Francisco can see economy fares comparable to Newark routes. Houston Intercontinental connects the Gulf Coast to West Coast and Hawaii routes. Denver serves as a mid-country hub where East-to-West routes through Denver create additional long-haul companion fare opportunities. San Francisco and Los Angeles complete the West Coast hub set with long-haul options to Hawaii and the East Coast.

United hub companion fare value map: Newark (NY area cardholders) → LA/SF/SEA/HNL routes; O'Hare (Chicago area) → HNL/LAX/SFO; Houston (Gulf Coast) → West Coast/HNL; Denver (mountain west) → East Coast/East-West routes. All hubs offer transcon and Hawaii options for maximum companion fare savings.

CROSS-AIRLINE COMPARISON: UNITED COMPANION FARE VS. THE INDUSTRY

United's companion fare benefits coexist in a landscape that includes several major airline companion programs, each with a different structure. Delta's companion certificate charges the companion only government taxes (approximately $30–$80), making it the most generous in absolute companion savings terms on any given route. However, Delta's certificate is tied to American Express cards and is primarily valuable for travelers who already fly Delta regularly.

Alaska Airlines Bank of America card companion fare benefit also uses a companion fare model — a set discounted fare rather than taxes-only — making it structurally similar to United's model. Southwest's Companion Pass is the most powerful industry companion benefit in absolute terms, offering unlimited companion travel for an entire calendar year on all Southwest flights — but earning the Companion Pass requires accumulating 135,000 Companion Pass qualifying points, a significant achievement threshold.

For regular United flyers who hold Chase United cards and fly at least one domestic round trip with a companion each year, the companion fare benefit is the natural tool for this purpose — avoiding the need to manage multiple airline loyalty programs or cards just for the companion benefit. The companion fare's value, while not as dramatically low as a taxes-only program, is a meaningful annual benefit that regular United cardholders are positioned to capture without any program switching.

Industry comparison: Delta (taxes-only, ~$30-80) is most favorable in absolute companion savings. Alaska uses companion fare model like United. Southwest Companion Pass is unlimited but requires 135K qualifying points. United's companion fare is the natural choice for existing United MileagePlus cardholders.

DETAILED ROUTE ECONOMICS: MODELING COMPANION FARE VALUE

To make the companion fare value modeling concrete, consider the full cost structure of a Newark-to-Los-Angeles round trip in standard economy during peak summer. Standard economy fares might be $420 round trip. The primary cardholder pays $420 for their ticket. The companion pays the companion fare (a set discounted amount). Companion savings: $420 minus companion fare = substantial. Both travelers earn MileagePlus miles on their respective fares. The primary cardholder additionally earns Chase United card bonus miles on the $420 primary purchase.

Contrast with a Newark-to-Philadelphia round trip in standard economy during off-peak. Standard economy fares might be $130 round trip. The companion's savings: $130 minus companion fare = much smaller gap. For routes where the economy fare approaches or falls below the companion fare level, the benefit barely saves anything.

This modeling exercise demonstrates that the companion fare benefit's value is highly route-sensitive. The strategic implication: never apply the companion benefit without first calculating the regular economy fare and confirming it significantly exceeds the companion fare amount. For routes where the gap is modest, delay the companion benefit use and wait for a higher-value qualifying trip within the anniversary year. Call +1(855)235-0484 for route-specific companion fare availability and value assessment.

Route economics modeling: Newark-to-LA at $420 with companion fare discount = high savings; Newark-to-Philadelphia at $130 with same companion fare = minimal savings. Always calculate regular fare minus companion fare before applying the benefit.

UNITED VS. AMERICAN AND ALASKA COMPANION PROGRAMS: STRUCTURAL COMPARISON

United's Chase-issued companion fare benefit exists alongside structurally similar programs at American Airlines (through Barclays AAdvantage Aviator and Citi AAdvantage cards) and Alaska Airlines (through Bank of America Alaska Visa Signature cards). Understanding how United's program compares to these peer programs helps

United MileagePlus cardholders assess the relative value of the companion fare benefit they hold.

American's AAdvantage companion program (through qualifying credit cards) is structured as an annual companion certificate — similarly tied to card anniversary renewal. Alaska's Bank of America companion fare is also a set discounted fare model, similar to United's approach. Each program ties companion travel to card anniversary renewal and requires specific booking processes.

The key differentiating factor for United MileagePlus cardholders: United's extensive domestic hub network at Newark, O'Hare, Houston, Denver, San Francisco, and Los Angeles provides access to long-haul domestic routes where companion fare savings are maximized. The companion fare is most valuable to the cardholder who flies United as their primary airline — they already have the card, earn MileagePlus miles, and can apply the companion benefit to trips they're already planning on United. For cardholders who don't primarily fly United, the companion fare benefit's value is reduced by the need to book United specifically.

Structural comparison: United, American, and Alaska all use set companion fare or certificate models tied to card anniversary. Delta uses taxes-only model. United's benefit is most valuable to cardholders who already fly United as their primary carrier.

COMPANION FARE AND TSA PRECHECK, KNOWN TRAVELER NUMBERS, AND AIRPORT EXPERIENCE

When booking a companion fare, including both travelers' Known Traveler Numbers (for TSA PreCheck) and Global Entry membership information ensures both travelers receive TSA PreCheck screening benefits on the booking. The companion's Known Traveler Number should be added to their traveler profile in United's system and provided when the companion fare booking is processed.

Airport check-in for companion fare travelers: both the primary cardholder and the companion check in normally — either via mobile boarding pass, united.com, or airport check-in. The companion fare booking appears as a standard United economy reservation in all check-in systems. No special companion fare check-in process is required at the airport. Both travelers have standard boarding pass and priority access based on their individual MileagePlus status and seat assignments.

Companion fare airport logistics are identical to standard bookings: standard check-in process, Known Traveler Number should be included at booking for TSA PreCheck, boarding based on individual status and seat. No special companion fare airport procedures required.

COMPANION FARE AND ELITE QUALIFYING CREDIT: THE PREMIER STATUS CONNECTION

For United MileagePlus Premier members using the companion fare benefit, the interaction between companion fare bookings and Premier status qualification is worth understanding. The primary cardholder earns Premier Qualifying Flights (PQFs) and Premier Qualifying Points (PQPs) on the primary ticket as on any qualifying United paid flight. These elite qualifying credits contribute to Premier status requalification or earned status upgrade. The companion's PQF and PQP earning on the companion fare ticket depends on the companion's own status level.

This means that for cardholders who are managing Premier status requalification, companion fare trips on qualifying long-haul routes contribute elite qualifying credits in addition to the companion fare savings. A Newark-to-Honolulu round trip produces substantial PQPs for the primary cardholder's Premier status qualification, on top of the companion fare savings. For United MileagePlus members who track Premier status requalification carefully, incorporating companion fare trips on long-haul routes into the annual status plan produces dual benefit: companion savings plus elite qualifying credits. Call +1(855)235-0484 for Premier status earning questions on companion fare bookings.

Elite qualifying credits: primary cardholder earns PQFs and PQPs on primary ticket — companion fare trips on long-haul routes contribute meaningfully to Premier status requalification. Dual benefit: companion savings + elite qualifying credits on the same trip.

THE COMPANION FARE IN MULTI-CARD HOUSEHOLD STRATEGY

Households where multiple members hold Chase United credit cards may have access to multiple annual companion fare benefits — one per qualifying card per anniversary year. A household with one Chase United Club Infinite cardholder and one Chase United Explorer cardholder, for example, may have two companion fare benefits available in a given year, each with its own benefit terms and expiration.

Multi-card household companion fare strategy: each card's companion fare benefit is tracked independently by its own anniversary date. The household can potentially apply

two companion fare benefits to two separate qualifying trips within the same calendar year. Or, if the benefit terms allow, the same two household members can use each other's companion fare benefits on different trips — for example, Traveler A uses their card's benefit with Traveler B as the companion on Trip 1; Traveler B uses their card's benefit with Traveler A as the companion on Trip 2. This creates two companion fare savings events from two card annual fees.

Multi-card household: multiple Chase United cardholders in the same household may have multiple annual companion fare benefits. Each tracked independently by anniversary date. Potential for two companion fare savings events from two cards in the same year.

INTERNATIONAL FEEDER ROUTE COMPANION FARE OPPORTUNITIES

Chase United cardholders who primarily fly internationally may have companion fare opportunities on domestic feeder routes to United's international gateway airports, even if the international flight itself doesn't qualify for the companion fare. A Newark-to-Los-Angeles round trip, for example, might be the domestic component of a broader international itinerary — and if the Newark-to-LA segment is a separate ticketed domestic booking, the companion fare benefit could apply.

The practical application: if you're traveling internationally via a United gateway but also have a domestic trip with a companion planned in the same year, applying the companion fare to the domestic trip produces companion savings even when the international trip itself is ineligible. The companion fare benefit is most useful when matched with trips where United is the natural carrier for the domestic route and the regular economy fare is substantial. Call +1(855)235-0484 for any question about international itinerary companion fare eligibility.

International feeder route opportunity: even primarily international travelers may have domestic companion fare opportunities on feeder routes to international gateways. The companion fare applies to qualifying domestic segments regardless of whether a connected international trip is in the itinerary.

ANNUAL PLANNING, EXPIRATION MANAGEMENT, AND BOOKING CHECKLIST

- At card anniversary: note companion fare amount and expiration date from benefit documentation

- Identify all domestic round trips planned in the next 12 months; rank by expected economy fare
- Set calendar reminder 90 days before companion benefit expiration
- For transcon or Hawaii targets: check availability 3–4 months before planned travel
- Calculate: regular fare minus companion fare = expected savings before committing
- Purchase primary ticket on united.com in qualifying economy fare class (not Basic Economy)
- Call +1(855)235-0484 immediately after purchasing primary ticket to apply companion benefit
- Have ready: benefit reference number, primary booking reference, companion legal name and DOB
- Confirm both booking confirmations and seat assignments before ending the call
- For benefit questions or expiring certificates: call +1(855)321-3507

Annual companion fare planning cycle: note fare amount at renewal → identify high-value route → book 3-4 months early for peak routes → purchase primary ticket → call {PH1_} to apply benefit → confirm both bookings. Consistent cycle produces maximum multi-year value.

United Companion Fare — Quick Reference

Route/Scenario	Companion Fare Value	Action
Newark to Honolulu, peak summer	Very high	Apply companion fare — call {PH1_} early
O'Hare to Los Angeles, Thanksgiving	High	Apply companion fare — call {PH1_}
Newark to Chicago, off-peak	Low	Reserve for higher-value route if possible
Basic Economy primary ticket	May be excluded	Upgrade to standard economy
Benefit expiring in 30 days	Book any qualifying route	Better than forfeiture — call {PH1_}
Companion is Premier Platinum	Premier benefits apply to companion's own ticket	Confirm upgrade eligibility

Frequently Asked Questions

Is the United companion fare a good deal compared to just buying two tickets?

Yes, on long-haul routes during peak periods where the companion fare is well below the regular economy fare. On a Newark-to-Honolulu round trip where economy fares are $600, a companion fare of a substantially lower amount represents hundreds of dollars in savings. On short routes where economy fares are low, the savings margin is smaller. The calculation: if companion savings exceed what you'd have paid anyway, the benefit provides clear value. Call +1(855)235-0484 for specific route-level companion fare value analysis.

Can I use the United companion fare on Star Alliance partner flights?

United companion fare benefits are typically limited to United-operated flights — not partner-operated Star Alliance flights. A flight with a United (UA) flight number that is actually operated by Lufthansa, ANA, or another partner would generally not qualify. Confirm the operating carrier is United before purchasing. Call {PH1_} to verify specific itinerary eligibility.

If both my companion and I are Premier Gold members, do we both get complimentary upgrades?

Both you and your companion may be waitlisted for complimentary upgrades based on your respective Premier status levels, but upgrade priority and eligibility depends on how the companion booking is structured. Call +1(855)235-0484 when applying the companion benefit and specifically ask about upgrade eligibility for both travelers — the agent can clarify how Premier status applies to the companion booking.

Does holding multiple Chase United cards give me multiple companion fare benefits?

Each qualifying Chase United card you hold may independently provide a companion fare benefit upon its own anniversary renewal. If you hold both a United Club Infinite Card and a United Explorer Card, each card's benefit year is tracked independently. Call +1(855)321-3507 or check each card's specific benefit documentation for the companion fare benefit on each card.

What is the advance purchase requirement for the United companion fare?

The advance purchase requirement varies by card tier and is specified in the annual benefit documentation. Some cards require booking a minimum number of days in

advance; others may have more flexible timing. Additionally, popular routes benefit from earlier booking regardless of any minimum advance purchase requirement. Call +1(855)235-0484 to confirm the advance purchase terms for your specific card.

Can the companion be a minor traveling with an adult?

Yes. The companion can be a minor traveling with the adult cardholder on the same itinerary. Standard United minor passenger policies apply. Provide the minor's full name as it appears on their ID document and their date of birth when calling to apply the companion benefit.

What happens if the companion needs to cancel after the companion fare is applied?

Standard fare rules apply to the companion's ticket for changes and cancellations. Refundability depends on the fare class of the companion fare booking. The companion fare benefit itself may or may not be restored to the account depending on when and why the cancellation occurs. Call +1(855)235-0484 to understand the cancellation terms for your specific companion fare booking before cancelling.

Should I pay for my primary ticket with my Chase United card?

Paying for the primary ticket with your Chase United card earns bonus MileagePlus miles on the purchase (Chase United cards typically offer bonus miles per dollar on United purchases) in addition to the companion fare benefit. While the companion fare benefit itself is tied to card membership rather than payment method, using the card for the purchase maximizes total MileagePlus miles earned on the trip. Call +1(855)321-3507 for any questions about miles earning on companion fare bookings.

The United Airlines companion fare benefit — a discounted set fare for one companion on qualifying United-operated domestic flights, earned annually by Chase United MileagePlus cardholders — provides annual value that is maximized through strategic route selection and timing. Understanding the companion fare model (discounted set fare, not taxes-only), calculating expected savings as regular fare minus companion fare, targeting long-haul domestic routes during peak demand periods through United's hub network, and managing the annual expiration window to ensure the benefit is used each year gives any Chase United cardholder the complete framework for extracting full value from this benefit consistently over the card's tenure. For companion fare booking and route optimization, call +1(855)235-0484.

Information current as of August 2026. United Airlines and Chase MileagePlus credit card companion fare terms may change. Verify current terms at united.com or by calling United directly.